Depot Town Rag

Volume 16, Number 12 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

100% FREE
Rag Content
December 1993

- **Historic schools**
- The Calf Path
- *Old school ties*
- **Learning our lessons**

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

From diversity to divisiveness:

It's a way of life in Our Town

- In 1853, the east side seceded from the west side in an unfriendly rivalry.
- North/south divisions were traditonally racial, despite the fact that African-Americans' land dated back to the French Claim of the Louis' of France.
- The Ladies Library closed down to keep 'the newcomers' out.
- There was no place for the children of the war effort, so the Feds built them a school.
- Some businesspersons blamed historic preservation for their district's demise.
- East and West middle schools immediately accepted the 'us vs. them' tradition.
- Depot Towners still blame the interstate highway system and the malling of America for the loss of small towns.
- Few citizens choose to ever run again for local office, after the beatings they must take for their policy decisions.
- Public schools are without a superintendent and lacking in leadership while committees blame each other for the mess.
- Ann Arborites hate Ypsilanti almost as much as the rest of the state hates Ann Arbor.

It's a historical stance of orneriness that we seem to enjoy too much -- and the unpleasant tradition continues into the twenty-first century. Rather than look for solutions, we seem to seek only 'who to blame.'

What are the kids learning today?

School crises, state and local, viewed from Depot Town's historical point of view

Let's play school - in Ypsilanti

The third Seminary/Union School in 1890

"The trouble with kids, today," is the way some oldsters like to start an ageist diatribe berating the younger generation but, if we really look at what the adults are doing, it's no wonder our schools seem to get such a bad rap. From the governor and state legislature to the local policy-makers and their constant critics, the model for hostility in the school lunchrooms and classrooms seems to come from above.

This month's view of the educational establishment comes from somewhere between the large teacher training institution up on the hill and Depot Town's cozy little Teachers Shop which markets teaching tools for public, private and home school situations. Somewhere between those unique institutions is a history of American education - which formed a protective local triangle around the old railroad district.

There's never been a school in Depot Town. This has traditionally been the place for kids to come when they weren't in school - on the way to and from classes, field trips, or skipping. But we've still been the center of educational activity - as an educational alternative.

The city's most impressive looking school was The Seminary, which stood at the top of the hill overlooking this block as a monument to the American ethic of free public schooling. Ypsi's high school yearbook is still called the *Ypsi Sem* in memory of those halcyon days in education.

East side schools, Prospect and Gilbert elementaries, were noteworthy in their excellence.

- Prospect School became a model for governmental cooperation when the adjacent Prospect Park, owned by the city, became the school's playground. When the school was remodeled, many of the former architectural artifacts were incorporated into the new structure and the building was renamed for a much-loved teacher there: Alice Adams.
- Gilbert School faced the town square (also named for the same Gilbert as in Gilbert House retirement home and the mansard-roofed Gilbert mansion). That robust piece of Victoriana was torn down and a more business-like structure replaced it and was renamed Woodruff School. Even then, the kindergarten room had a fireplace! In the last decade the school district closed it down and sold it to a parochial enterprise which renamed it Huron Valley School.

Legal boundaries notwithstanding, Willow Run became Ypsilanti's defacto East Side High.

Until real school reform

... this old block will continue to be the learning alternative it has been for more than 160 years...

- **Extra-mural alternative** - School trips to the caboose and Farmers' market, places to show school art work, concerts, a place to publish student works.
- **Intra-mural alternative** - Music and athletics in the parks. Frog Island was the high school athletic field not many years ago; why not again?
- **Organized alternative** - Hands-on projects for business courses, marketing classes, planners, promoters and other aficianadoes of the real world.
- **After school (or skipping) alternative** - While school officials ruminate, this is still a good place to come for dinner, a hair cut, a bump-out or artsy antiques. In fact, many of our business owners and managers say, "It's been a real learning experience." Maybe we could just close the schools and invite everybody down to play school in Depot Town.

It could happen!

Riverside Park
Festival of Lights
continues through New Year's Eve Jubilee

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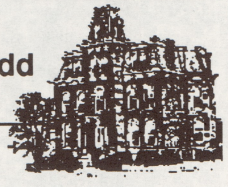

• Family Law
• Criminal Law
• Probate, Wills, and Trusts
• Personal Injury
300 N. Huron, Ypsilanti MI 48197
313-487-2611

Ypsilanti's FARMERS' MARKET
Holiday Bazaar
Saturday, December 4
7am - 3 pm
Crafts • Gifts • Food • Music!
Wreaths, roping, centerpieces, flowers, fruit & food baskets, gourmet food gifts, poinsettias, and all the Holiday Fixings!
Visit the Market's Holiday Sales every Wednesday & Saturday in December
483-1480

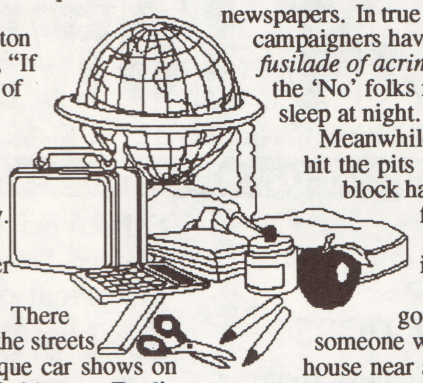
FOR RENT
Depot Town apartment
No pets, no smokers
2nd floor railroad flat, 1 or 2 people
Back porch overlooks Farmers' Market
434-4555 any time

Can you recall a worse time?

Another opportunity for Ypsi to get into the history books

The coming school board recall election may actually be a vote for or against Henry Ford. Long a folk hero of this area, sometime around the time Ford turned his soybean fields into what is today's Willow Run Airport, he declared, "History is bunk!"

Flying in the face of Winston Churchill who admonished, "If we do not learn the lessons of history, we are destined to repeat them," Ford's modern homily was sloganized by the anti-intellectual community.



Since that time the war was won and Ford's bomber plant became the home of Kaiser-Frazer automobiles. There aren't a lot of Henry Js on the streets today - except for the antique car shows on East Cross Street - but that's history. Ford's plant then went to General Motors - and that's closed its doors too. More history.

If local history repeats itself again, the school board recall election wording could very well read as many past election proposals have: Vote 'yes' if you're against it; vote 'no' if you're for it. It doesn't make much sense, but it's the way we do things around here when campaigns shed more heat than light.

Much of the campaign for this election seems based on personal humiliation and villification in letters to the editors of the daily newspapers. In true Victorian tradition, 'Yes' campaigners have provided a *fulminating fusilade of acrimonious alliteration*, and the 'No' folks mostly cry themselves to sleep at night.

Meanwhile, the housing market has hit the pits in Ypsi and nearly every block has young families looking for housing in school districts with greater stability for their kids.

It seems the days are gone when an optimist was someone who was looking to buy a house near a school. Today's young family is likely to forbid their children to watch school board meetings on the local cable TV channel. It's a bad way to learn either manners *or* parliamentary procudure.

Conflict resolution is taught in some of the more modern schools, but it doesn't seem to work its way up the food chain.

Maybe Ypsilanti will show the way.

A poem to recite for schools in Ypsilanti and Michigan

The Calf Path

- author unknown

One day through the primeval wood
A calf walked home, as good calves should,
But made a trail, all bent askew
A crooked trail, as all calves do.
Since then 300 years have fled
And I infer the calf is dead.
But still, he left behind his trail
And thereby hangs my mortal tale.

The trail was taken up next day
By a lone dog, that passed that way.
And then, a wise bell wethered sheep
Pursued the trail, o'er vale and steep,
And drew the flocks behind him too
As good bell wethers always do.
And from that day, o'er hill and glade
Thru those old woods, a path was made.

And many men wound in and out,
And dodged, and turned and bent about,
And uttered words of righteous wrath
Because 'twas such a crooked path.
But still they followed - do not laugh -
The first migrations of that calf.
And thru the winding woods they stalked
Because he wobbled when he walked.

This forest path became a lane
That bent, and turned and turned again.
This crooked lane became a road
Where many a poor horse with his load
Toiled on beneath the burning sun
And traveled some three miles in one.
And thus a century and a half
They trod the footsteps of that calf.

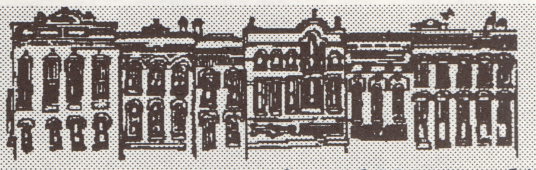
The years passed on in swiftness fleet.
The road became a village street,
And this, before men were aware,
A city's crowded thoroughfare.
And soon the central street was this
Of a renowned metropolis.
And men, two centuries and a half
Trod the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a 100 thousand route
Followed the zig-zag calf about,
And after his crooked journey went
The traffic of a continent.
A 100 thousand men were led
By one calf, near three centuries dead.
They followed still his crooked way
And lost 100 years per day.
For this such reverence is lent
To well established precedent.

A moral lesson this might teach
Were I ordained, and called to preach
For men are prone to go it blind
Along the calf paths of the mind,
And work away from sun to sun
To do what other men have done.
They follow in the beaten track,
And out, and in, and forth, and back,
And still their devious course pursue
To keep the paths that others do.

They keep the paths a sacred groove
Along which all their lives they move,
But how the wise old wood gods laugh
Who saw that first primeval calf.
Ah, many things this tale might teach,
But I am not ordained to preach.

Dateline: Depot Town:



A Neighborhood Forgotten by Time (and Life and Newsweek)

Stores' unique awning shows creativity, innovation

When the elegant, new awning(s) appeared on the facade of the Newel Block last month, many who feared too-tight control from the Historic District Ordinance breathed a sigh of relief. Although the installation shelters the windows of **Depot Town Travel, Miller's Ice Cream Parlor** and **Ike's Barbershop**, the long span is broken with indentations at every window, door and architectural element.

Still in the tradition of shed-style canvas awnings, this colorful addition to the block is fresh and creative in its design and execution.

No passers-by can resist the urge to examine this awning from the usual point of view - and then peek up inside it to see how its fabricators have managed so unusual and tasteful a design.

School crisis to be solved by best politics $ can buy

It used to be that only the very rich could get the ear of a politician in Lansing but, now that Political Action Committees (PACs) are formed, even the local school marms can get a word in for their favorite cause: kids in the classroom.

When Michigan teachers viewed with alarm how the governor and the legislature were playing precipitously with the ed biz this year, they quickly hustled donations of $90 each to buy off the legislators ... just like everybody else has done in our state's political history. With the clout of thousands of teachers' dollars, they hoped their voice would be heard.

Many of today's legislators were students of theirs and there is speculation they might not have learned their lessons well. Some citizens still buy those cute coffee cups bearing the slogan: "Three best things about being a teacher: June, July and August," but haven't checked the school calendar lately to note that school runs until mid-June and opens well before Labor Day.

Michigan dollars are easily spent on the ever-growing prison population, but there's little speculation on spending that much on the programs the criminals gradutated from: the public schools.

Teachers still hang out in Depot Town eateries and superintendents and board members are often seen hitting the local taverns after an especially long board meeting. Counting carefully to not violate the State's open meetings act, they still repair to the homespun sanity of this historic district to ruminate over the sad state of their calling, today.

In a recent school election, a candidate's brochure stated the board needed goals - but didn't suggest what they should be. After the election, they mounted a *retreat* - which seemed appropriate, after recognizing the current political condition of the district.

It's no secret any more

After several entrees to the block over the past few years, **Leon's Secret Garden** has appeared at 18 East Cross Street as a full-time business establishment.

Leon Varney's delicious and unusual chocolate creations were first sampled as prizes in cooking contests at the Freighthouse. Now, at long last, the tiniest shop in the block features his magical white chocolate almond popcorn, truffles, anise, cranberry and cherry amoretto-flavored specialties. Leon's original chocolate cabbage cake tops the list of his delicacies.

He'll fit right in - he claims to have seen the 'ghost of Charlie Dickens' in his shop!

As seen on TV...

More and more views of the block are being featured on local cable TV commercials. **City Body Carstar's** promo shows the outside of their ancient real estate and contrasts it with their high-tech interior while **Richard Reid's Hair Station** has been boosting the block since June with interior/exterior contrasts.

Just about everyone who's moved to this new advertising medium seems to state the fact that they're in "Depot Town" and feature a long shot of this beautiful block of historic buildings.

Sidetrack Grill's and **Aubree's** recent audition for a feature in a national beer commercial not only sold the rest of the world on their ambiance, but convinced the rest of us that we're in the right place, too!

Watch your neighbors' ads in the dailies, too. Since the district's turn-around, everyone has been sure to include "in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town" in their ads, flyers, invoices, business cards, matchbook covers, and even an occasional dinner napkin.

We remember the Old School Ties:

-From Harvey C. Colburn's 1923 "The Story of Ypsilanti" and the 1973 "Ypsilanti Area Sesquicentennial Booklet"

"Education in the 1820's was dependent upon the charity of private citizens. The first school in Ypsilanti was said to have been opened by Olive Gorton. The school was held in a house built on the west bank of the Huron River. Since there was no bridge spanning the river at that time, children who lived on the east side were rowed across morning and night by Miss Gorton. For this and teaching, she received a weekly salary of $2.

"William Harwood, concerned for the education of the children, built the first schoolhouse in Ypsilanti. The school was opened in 1831 and Miss Laura Vail was hired as the teacher..."

"One of the most significant stories to come out of the 1840's was the development of public education in Ypsilanti. It probably began when Francis Griffin used a meeting room in the Presbyterian Church for a school. His school was later relocated in a four-storied building called "The Nunnery." The school was successful for a time, but soon disappeared. Following Griffin was a man named Landreth. His attempts at maintaining an academic school which specialized in Latin and Greek also failed..."

"In Landreth's employ was an ambitious young man named Charles Woodruff who took over Landreth's floundering school. Woodruff improved the school's quarters by moving out of the Larzelere Block into the old Tecumseh Hotel. The school continued at this location until the hotel was sold to a company headed by Reverend L. H. Moore. It was Moore's hope to establish a school under the name of "Ypsilanti Seminary." Charles Woodruff left the school about this time and later became editor of the village newspaper.

"During this era, schools were largely supported by charity and built by a few interested citizens. Only the well-to-do sent their children. It was through the efforts of a few men on the village school board that Ypsilanti residents were made aware of their responsibility to educate all the area children. It was the idea of the school board to buy the Tecumseh Hotel for a district school and to have the public share in the purchase of it.

"Changes were made in the building, and the new school opened it doors in October, 1849. The "Model School," as it was called, was very popular among the young people. The upper floors were turned into dormitories which were occupied by out-of-town students. Discipline was harsh. A bell rang for rising and retiring. All lights were out by 10 p.m., and the students could not leave the building during study hours without a pass. The Model School was said to have been the first 'graded" school in Michigan, and the name was eventually changed to "Union Seminary" ...

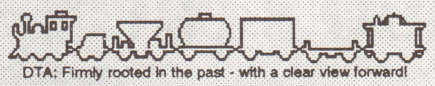
But it's all different, today . . .

Ypsilanti's public schools seem embroiled in a new and different controversy as we approach 'modern times.' After the Governor's intransigence cut $4.2 million from the Ypsilanti budget, the schools regrouped and wound up only $2.3 million in the hole in June of 1993. After several months without a business and finance director and unable to hire a new superintendent, the local board was severely criticized by some for changing food service contracts and purchasing a new building while they were closing another. To some these were the straws that the broke the back of the local educational establishment and they mounted a recall campaign to unseat three of the board members.

This month, the district remains without a permanent superintendent and awaits information to support choices to be made in the recall election.

The so-called 'Victorians' had an expression for the continuity of the business of education: "While school keeps" may not fit these troubled times.

Depot Town Association, Inc., 18 November 1993



DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

President Monaghan called the meeting on order at **7:30 pm at Cady's Grill.**

October minutes corrected to show Tommy Steele will send out Victorian Holiday flyers.

Treasury holds a balance of $8350.66.

Committee reports:

Victorian Holiday is Saturday and Sunday, December 4 & 5. Bands, carolers, Charles Dickens, press coverage, costumes, merchant flyers, decorations are all expected for the event. DTA will purchase bows and greens for the light poles. Leon Varney will create merchants' door wreaths at cost ($10 + ribbons and extras). Volunteers will cut and paint wooden characters for street art. Remington/Walker will store them after the event. Santa will roam the district and DTA will purchase a new $80 wig and beard for him. Anyone interested in downtown's old decorations? Carol Clare will investigate them through the City.

New Year Jubilee needs volunteers in the Freighthouse for the musical program January 31. Call Carolyn McKeever at 483-4256.

St. Patrick's Day Parade is being planned by David French and committee for noon - 1:30 pm Thursday, March 17. All high school bands, Alma College Kiltie Band and Windsor Fife & Drum are expected. Route is down Cross Street from the Water Tower to Depot Town with EMU/Greek floats possible. TV coverage is expected, since it's the only St. Paddy's Parade in the state of Michigan.

Every month's a holiday at his place, says Leon Varney, of Leon's Secret Garden.

Ypsi Area Street Rods are investigating having their entire May 1 event in Depot Town and Riverside Park this year. DTA will include City's Amy McMillan in the negotiations as they plan for porta-johns, liability, etc. Will they charge admission? Is there a kick-back for sponsorship? 400-500 cars are expected this year. Talkss continue.

Old Business:

Kiosk/directory will be updated with current businesses and financed by DTA.

Caboose is still neither finished nor secure. Paul Fetters will get another contractor to secure it, DDA will reimburse DTA for cost up to $100.

New flyer proposal from Karen Brenner? No report this month.

Award idea: Bonni Rosen-Fine has donated 20 Xmas train incense burners to be used as awards, prizes, or trophies and seeks a worthy cause. Give her ideas.

Shoppers' Survey will be reactivated by Paul Fetters with $10 gift certificates good for purchases at participating businesses. He'll get them printed, distributed, collected and drawn. Needs help with awards.

New business:

Great Train Race will be sponsored for its 14th year next August, meanwhile, Gary McKeever will negotiate with Ann Arbor Track Club to take over the management of that event for DTA in 1995.

Rag Report: The December issue will examine the history of public education in America - with Depot Town at its epicenter.

Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, 16 December 1993 at the Sidetrack Grill.

Strictly local stuff: December1993

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

- **D'town Development Authority**
  8 a.m. Wednesday, 2nd
  at The Daily Grind
- **Depot Town Association**
  7:30 p.m. Thursday, 16th
  at the Sidetrack Grill
- **Depot Town Antique Engine Club**
  Annual Xmas Party, Saturday, 11th
  Freighthouse, reservations
- **Victorian Holiday**
  All day Saturday, December 4th
  throughout the district & Market
- **2nd Annual New Year Jubilee**
  6pm - midnight,
  Depot Town and Riverside Park
  Badge sale information: 482-4920
- **Festival of Lights**
  Through New Year's eve
  in Riverside Park

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate. -Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
Judi D. Monaghan, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Health and Politics: Co-op's coffee better than cocaine

The coffee sold at Depot Town's Food Co-op is certified organically grown, and roasted in facilities approved by The Organic Growers and Buyers Association. There are obvious benefits to buying organic coffee since, as health-conscious consumers, we like to avoid chemical pesticides and preservatives.

But what most consumers don't realize is that supporting the coffee industry can be a politically incorrect luxury. The nations that grow coffee rely on it as an export commodity and, in some nations, coffer growers are grossly taken advantage of by their government. Interestingly enough, the organic coffee industry was created by international organizations like the United Nations to benefit the countries which participated in its development.

What was happening in these tropical climates, was that the coca plant - which produces cocaine - was taking over the market because it could command a much higher price than coffee. So the UN developed a program called "Program for the Substitution of Illegal Crops", with its ultimate objective being to implement alternatives to coca production. The UN sent agricultural specialists to Columbia to teach farmers organic production techniques.

Since coffee is in such demand around the world, the organic coffee growers produced a superior product in quality and, in doing so have an incentive to eliminate coca productions on their land. The UN has worked in conjunction with an association of coffee producers known as Aspro-Sucre, which plans to take control of the project in 1994. The organic coffees as the co-op are purchased through Frontier Herbs, which has made arrangements to purchase over 150,000 pounds of certified coffees through this project.

"Merry Christmas"
From:
Hansen's
Standard Printing
We Have A Variety of Christmas Cards For You & Your Business
35 E. Cross St. • Historic Depot Town
Ypsilanti, Michigan
(313) 483-0339

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Esquire Custom Drapery & Blinds SINCE 1953
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James MacDonald's Antiques
29 East Cross • 481-0555
Apple Annie's Vintage Clothing

• Organic coffee tasting
• Low-fat holiday treats
• Recipes and samples
Saturday, December 11
11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
YPSILFOOD COOP
Sun. 12-5, M,T,Th, F 10-8 Wed. 10-9 Sat. 9-8
312 N. RIVER ST. 483-1520

A chronology of local education

1831 Wm. Harwood's school, Miss Laura Vail, teacher

1840's Frank Griffin's school in a room of the Presbyterian Church called "The Nunnery"

1849 Ypsilanti Seminary, the Model School, Union Seminary

1849 The Normal School for the training of teachers established

1881 Frederick Pease establishes the Music Conservatory at the Normal

1883 Patrick Roger Cleary establishes a business and commercial school in Cleary College

1894 Normal expands original building Normal adds gymnasium

1897 Mary Ann Starkweather donates Christian Association Building

1892 Ward Schools throughout village, 4th Ward School at corner of Prospect & Michigan Avenue

1893 Cleary College hit by cyclone

1906 Normal adds Science Building

1915 New High School built on West Cross for $122,000

1924-25 Lincoln High School started

1933 Cleary College incorporated as a private, non-profit institution

1943-44 Federal Funds establish separate school district for the war effort and createWillow Run Schools

1950's Chapelle and other new elementary schools built

1956 Michigan State Normal College becomes Eastern Michigan College

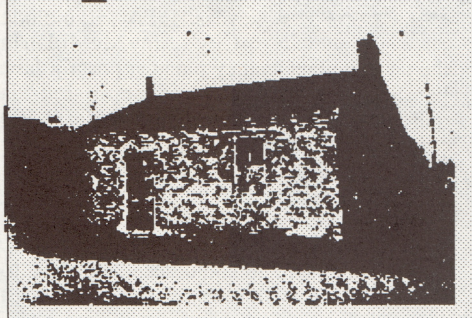
1959 Eastern Michigan College becomes Eastern Michigan University

1960 New Cleary College built west of Ypsilanti

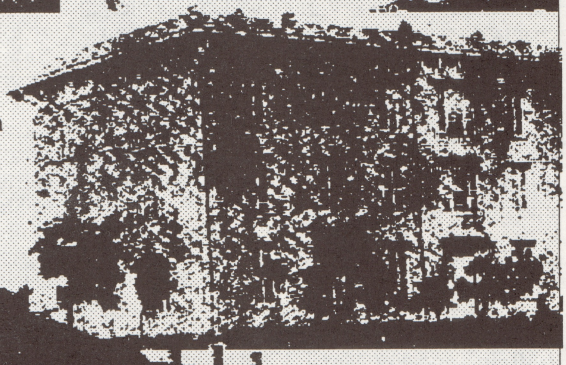
1973 New Ypsilanti High School built at Hewitt and Packard

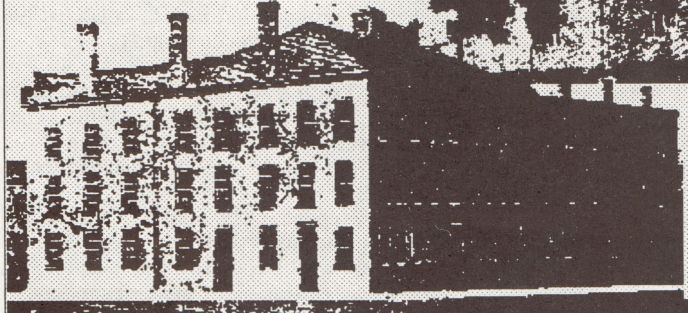
1993 Ypsilanti schools in turmoil of finance and confidence. No permanent superintendent and unions work without benefit of contracts. Board recall election imminent.

Ypsilanti's early schools

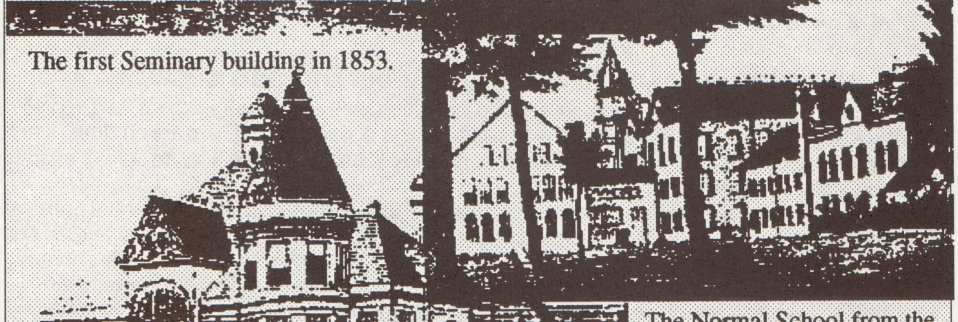


Above: Ypsilanti's first school house: The White School-House
Top right: The next school in town was housed in the First Presbyterian Church. This photo was made after the church was abandonded.

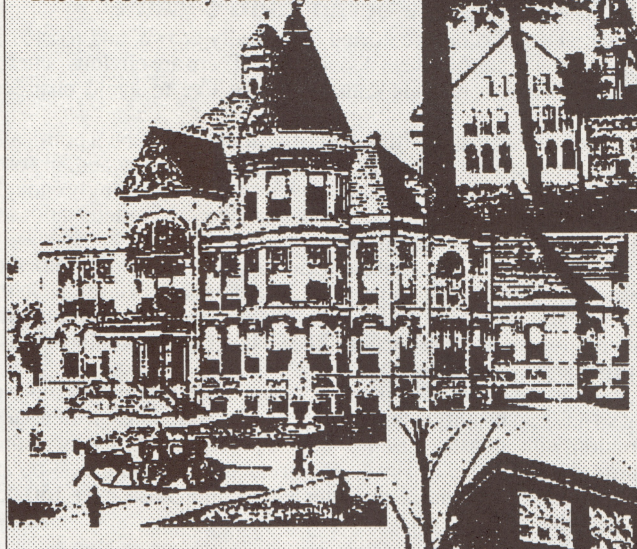




The original building at the Normal School for training teachers
[All from Harvey C. Colburn's The Story of Ypsilanti]



The first Seminary building in 1853.



The Normal School from the back (north) side showing the practice school in 1890
(From Frank Smith's "Souvenir of Ypsilanti, Mich.)

Cleary College on the site of EMU's College of Business

1993:
Ypsilanti, Willow Run and Lincoln school districts comprise three high schools, four middle/junior schools and seventeen different elementaries with 11,485 students enrolled.

Ypsilanti High School in 1916
[From the 1973 Sesquicentennial booklet]

Hottest little corner bar & grill in town!
Rated best burgers! - Detroit Monthly
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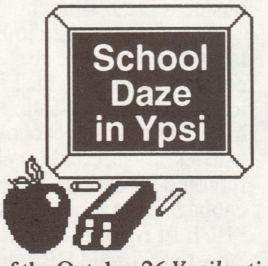
We're learning our lessons in or out of school



When the headline of the October 26 *Ypsilanti Press* said, "Recall election closer to reality," many readers wondered just what the reality of the educative process was in Ypsilanti . When someone says, "*I'm gonna teach you a lesson*," the statement is most often interpreted as a threat. *Tales out of school* too often detail hostility, violence, and general all-around mean spiritedness that seem to have taken the place of a nuturing learning process.

There's a *new school of thought* on how people learn, and it has lots to do with plugging into a computer or watching commercials on Channel One for the first lesson of the day. As we systematize the classroom, the children don't seem to be learning any more, any faster or any better. Some say they have too much to learn today -- just because so much more history has passed.

One thing we learned down in Depot Town was that much of our history is still here. It's in the very lives of the old folks on the block and that's why we listen to them so carefully.

So it is with the kids in the classrooms up the hill. They're learning their most important lessons from the people who have gone before them. Older siblings, alumni, parents and teachers teach lessons in subtle, but meaningful, ways. Local merchants, adult committees, and the school's policy-making boards give real meaning to the lesson of the day in the classroom.

And when the mommies and the daddies continue to fight and argue over issues that could have been resolved earlier and more easily, we wonder what these lessons are teaching tomorrow's policy-makers.

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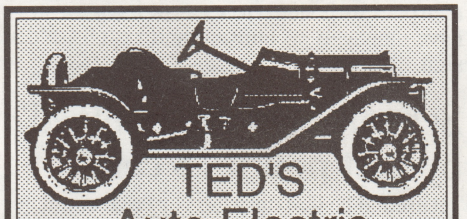
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